

# Student Voice: Understanding the Implications

## Being strong in your Māori cultural identity

Māori students clearly articulated that strong cultural identity was both a foundation for success and a tool for future success. Importantly they saw strong cultural identity as something that supported their ability to succeed in a wide range of activities and challenges.

- I think the key is starting with a strong foundation. And I guess that foundation is your culture, your identity. So if you have a strong start with a strong foundation, then you can build off that.
- I've learnt different aspects of Māori culture and those different aspects have helped shape who I am as a person and how I identify as Māori. So that for me is my biggest success, just finding who I am.

They expressed that strong cultural identity also related to strong self-esteem.

- There's a huge drive on excellence, but there's also a huge drive on keeping your culture alive. Making it known to you and to everybody else that you are Māori and you're proud to be Māori.
- So success as Māori for me is knowing who you are and where you come from, and being proud of who you are.

Māori students understood the benefits of being able to draw on two world-views rather than seeing this as a forced choice.

- For me it's being able to walk in both worlds, te ao Pākehā me te ao Māori (the Māori world and the Pākehā world), being able to balance them both, being able to implement them into your life, being able to recall the wisdom and tikanga (cultural customs and practices) of our tupuna (ancestors) who we should never forget. They made us. They are us, and we are them.

Māori students articulated the connection between strong cultural identity and education success; not just success by the individual but success for other Māori as well.

*"Being strong in your Māori cultural identity"*

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- Culture's important going through education, culture just brings it all back home.
- Being a successful Maori means a real strengthening of identity. The more we succeed, the more we identify with who we are, which resonates with where we're from, and obviously, we're Maori. By succeeding we give more power to our people, to our culture. It just means being able to grow, become bigger and spread our wings to other people, other Maori and it's just really, really cool.

Being able to engage with te ao Māori through their involvement in kapa haka was important to many of these Māori students.

- The learning of kapa haka, of environment, of nature; connect it to Māori and release it to the generations. That's the bigger picture that I see for the future in my life and that's what makes me proud.

For some of them, kapa haka was a way of finding out about their cultural heritage and for these students, engaging with their cultural heritage was what they saw as "*success as Māori*".

- I wasn't really raised in a Māori way so joining kapa haka was finding out more about my culture and learning about myself. That's success for me.
- I was disconnected from my culture for a long time, and it wasn't until my Year 9 Māori teacher, she just came up to me and asked me if I had any interest in it. I didn't at first, but she showed me the possibilities, where I could go with my Māori. If it wasn't for her encouraging me to learn my language, I probably wouldn't be where I am today.

For this student, involvement in kapa haka was a turning point in their ability and willingness to engage successfully in the education system.

- I used to be pretty bad in Year 9 and 10, but then when I joined kapa haka (Māori cultural performance) in Year 11, that changed me... changed who I am. I'm a better person now. Matua kind of dropped me in the deep end, made me step up and change. He just gave me a lot of opportunities and he's taught me a lot.

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## Activating our own agency by engaging others

*Kia tū māia ki runga i a rātou ake ahurea tuakiri.*

*Remain bold in accordance with their own cultural identity.*

*Live confidently - with affinity to whakapapa and at ease with a growing cultural competence in language, tikanga and identity.*

Consider the guiding principles of Ka Hikitia:

- Treaty of Waitangi - ensuring Māori students enjoy and achieve education success as Māori is a shared responsibility
- Māori potential approach – high expectations for Māori students to achieve
- Ako – a reciprocal, two-way teaching and learning approach
- Identity, language and culture count – Māori students benefit from seeing their experiences and knowledge reflected in teaching and learning
- Productive partnerships with key stakeholders – ongoing exchange of knowledge and information and the involvement of parents and whānau.

Which of these guiding principles from Ka Hikitia requires us to address the theme of cultural identity?

How do we provide opportunities for students to explore and develop their own cultural identity?

What opportunities are there for the following groups to contribute:

- leaders and teachers in the school?
- Other students? Māori and non-Māori?
- Family and home community?
- Iwi?

Consider

- What have been the results to date?
- What new possibilities would strengthen Māori students' cultural identity in our school?

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Recognising the importance of cultural identity and promoting and celebrating it requires deliberate acts by both Treaty partners if it is to become understood, authentic and embedded. Two Kia Eke Panuku schools share their perspectives in the videos '*Māori Succeeding as Māori*' and '*Deliberate Acts of Leadership*'.

- view: [the Leadership video kete](#)

The first video in the Cultural Identity kete features Māori considering the significance of cultural identity. You may wish to watch the other two videos in this kete that reflect one school's experience of providing opportunities to realise Māori succeeding as Māori.

view: [the Cultural Identity video kete](#)

see: [all student comments on this theme](#)